DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 456 CS 505 212

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TITLE Feminism, Communication and the Politics of Knowledge.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (35th, Honolulu, HI, May 23-27, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Problems; Communication Research; *Communications; Developing Nations; Economic Opportunities; *Females; *Feminism; Information Systems; *Mass Media; Quality of Life; Sex Discrimination; *Sex Role; *Social Change; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS MacBride Commission Report; United Nations

ABSTRACT

Recent retrieval of pre-nineteenth century feminist thought provides a telling lesson in the politics of knowledge creation and control. From a feminist perspective, very little research carried out within the critical research paradigm questions the "basic assumptions, conventional wisdom, media myths and the accepted way of doing things" that are embedded in and contribute to the structure of gender relations. Women, from the most to the least developed parts of the world, have become a fulcrum for the interpenetration of male-dominated transnational economics and communication, a phenomenon largely ignored by the media. In the matter of whose interests are being served in these various presences and absences of women in the international flow of capital and communication, it is impossible to ignore the role of national governments or international agencies, and at the level of national economic and information systems, the relationship between women and communications is analogous. An increase in the number of women media gatekeepers would not necessarily result in a solution to these problems. The United Nations Mid-Decade Conference on Women and the MacBride Report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems are two examples highlighting the mechanisms of control that exclude women from opportunities to direct changes for their benefit. With the balance of power--in terms of political control, economics, communication, and knowledge--so skewed, it is little wonder that the analyses of feminists who lived prior to the eighteenth century are still relevant and radical 300 years later. (HTH)

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FEMINISM, COMMUNICATION AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

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Presented at the 35th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, Honolulu, 23 - 27 May, 1985

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When in 1978 Dorothy Smith's thesis on the exclusion of women from the production of cultural forms was published, in which she explained the phenomenon in terms of men listening to and attending to only what other men have said, I was among those who heralded it as a 'breakthrough', yet 'Sophia' had introduced a similar thesis in 1739.
Dale Spender, Women of Ideas, p. 75. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983

'Sophia, a Person of Quality' is believed to be the pseudonym of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689 - 1762). Her pamphlet Woman not Inferior to Man constitutes 'from start to finish a radical feminist analysis which introduces many of the areas that have become identified as "priorities" among feminists today' (Spender, op. cit., p. 73), ranging from the construction of knowledge, to women as sex-objects and reproductive machines, from women's intellectual competence to their exclusion from public office.

The recent retrieval of this and other, even earlier, feminist thought is important in at least two ways. In the first place, it calls into question the notion of 'progress' in feminist scholarship, or for that matter in women's struggle for liberation: a good deal of feminist analysis which we currently perceive as 'new' and promising is in many respects, in the context of this reclaimed history, 'old' and has already proved largely unproductive. Secondly, the discovery that the 20th-century feminist movement was preceded by a broad and continuing procession of women - rather than by a scattering of aberrant and isolated voices - is a telling lesson in the politics of knowledge creation and control. For conventional history, unchallenged, not only draws a veil over women's past achievements but, in doing so, feeds a mythical but functional notion of contemporaneity in terms of both the emergence of feminist protest and of the development of responses. When one realises, for example, that 'in 1911 there had been twenty-one regular feminist periodicals in Britain, that there was a feminist bookshop, a women's press, and a women's bank run by and for women' (ibid., p. 4), the establishment of a new feminist media structure over the past decade

could be construed more as a recurring instance of systemic containment than as an example of progressive radical power.

The study of consciousness formation and of the legitimation of knowledge is a well-established focus for communication research and, as Gaye Tuchman's formulation makes clear, an obvious example of an existing 'field' to which a feminist perspective is absolutely central. 'For me, the significant questions in the study of media remain questions about consciousness and society. I am most concerned with what the media tell us about the differences between our own times and those of previous eras. Ultimately, that concern with consciousness forces consideration of dominant ideologies, the maintenance of power, the control and cooptation of social change, and the possibility of resistance to media hegemony. Such topics are the stuff and substance of a critical politics (Tuchman, 1983, p. 331). Thus Tuchman situates herself squarely within the framework of 'critical research' with its process-oriented epistemology and its political-analytical base (see Slack and Allor, 1983, for further discussion of these constituents of critical research).

In principle, the adoption of a critical research approach promises a close correspondence with the approach of feminist scholarship which 'insists that knowledge be made more accessible and more politically relevant' and which 'aims to transform the boundaries of knowledge, by offering a critique which highlights the absences and silences of orthodox approaches' (Brunt and Rowan, 1982, p.12). Critical research, it is claimed 'ideally addresses itself to the major issues of our time, and is concerned, amongst other things, with questioning the values and claims of the system, applying independent criteria, suggesting alternatives with regard to both means and ends, exploring the possibility of new forms and structures' (Halloran, 1982, pp. 168-9). In practice, however, from a feminist perspective very little research so far carried out within the critical research paradigm has even attempted to question the 'basic assumptions, conventional wisdom, media myths and the accepted ways of doing things' (ibid., p. 171) which are embedded in and contribute to the structure of gender relations. The exceptions (for example, Tuchman 1978; Fisher, Gandy and Jamus, 1981) have essentially come from women.

This, of course, takes us back to the basic problem of gender bias in knowledge production and the question of whether any paradigm can transcend that bias. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise are convinced that it cannot. Rejecting the notion of value-free theory or research, they see feminism as a distinct value-orientation. For them, feminist research is fundamentally involved with, and derives from, the nature of feminist consciousness. This implies 'seeing reality differently' and means that feminist research can never be done by men (Stanley and Wise, 1983, p. 32). This point of view is shared by Thelma McCormack (1983). Reviewing research on soap operas stretching back to the 1940s in terms of the theories used to interpret findings, she suggests that the concepts underlying these theories themselves reflect dominant sex stereotypes. David Morgan (1981) also rejects the absolute standard of objectivity implied by the term 'non-sexist methodology' and raises the problem of whether men could ever be considered as undertaking feminist research.

There is a crucial distinction to be made at this point between 'feminist research' and 'research on women'. Stanley and Wise argue that feminism itself provides them with a paradigm in the sense of a 'theoretically derived world view which provides the categories and concepts through and by which we construct and understand the world' (op. cit., p. 154). This perspective takes women and women's experience as the starting point for critical reflection and analysis. It is altogether different from, for example, David Morgan's attempt to show how the outcome of standard sociological investigations might be altered by 'adding in' a consideration of gender issues. This latter approach has commonly been followed by women social scientists anxious to fill knowledge gaps by focusing on what has been left out or overlooked. Stanley and Wise call this the 'women and ... syndrome'. Its obvious limitation is that it leaves unquestioned the conceptual underpinnings of the knowledge framework: its integrationist orientation leaves it open to rapid cooptation. As Thelma McCormack points out, the uncritical adoption of male-generated analytical and theoretical constructs by women means that they 'miss the deeper meaning' of the structural relationships between communications and the problem of gender (McCormack, op. cit., pp. 281-2).

Structural Relationships Between Women and Communication Systems

This lack of attention to the structural relationships between women and communication systems also arises from the heavy emphasis on micro-level content analysis studies - set within positivist research paradigm - which has typified the work on women's representation by and in the media. The questions asked by such studies, said Noreene Janus almost ten years ago, 'are ahistorical, apolitical, and in no way indicate how the images of women or men are related to the fundamental structures of society' (Janus, 1977, p. 21; see also Baehr, 1981 and Mattelart, 1981 for similar criticisms). At the same time, macro-level studies of communication processes, flows and structures which, over the past ten years have become increasingly concerned with global and transnational forces, have ignored the significance of these phenomena for women. To a large extent, this is due to the way in which 'women's issues' - in both academic and political settings - come to be separated off from the 'mainstream' of scholarly and political debate. This is, of course, another facet of the way in which knowledge is constructed and controlled. It arises from and supports an androcentric world view which makes women invisible.

The MacBride Report, one of the major substantive outcomes of the international information and communication debate of the 1970s, underscores two distinct aspects of the role played by transnationals in international economic and information flows. First, it says, 'these conglomerates mobilise capital and technologies and transfer them to the communication market' at the same time marketing 'countless socio-cultural consumer goods which serve as a vehicle for an amalgam of ideas, tastes, values and beliefs'. Second, says the MacBride Report, 'the transnationals exert a direct influence on the economic production apparatus of the countries in which they operate' (MacBride et al., 1980, p. 38). Taking each of these aspects in turn it is possible to show how, at the level of global information and economic systems, women are indeed a central - not to say focal - part of the processes of transnationalisation which are at issue.

The Global Relationship

Women in the industrialized world have long been the prime target for advertisers and marketers of consumer goods. Christine Frederick's book

in which the doctrine of the 'consumer society' was first elaborated, aptly entitled Selling Mrs Consumer, was published in 1929. Even earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century, J. Walter Thompson had been the first to seize on women's magazines as the most efficient and effective means of reaching a vast market: as JWT liked to repeat, 'women spend money' (Mattelart, op. cit., p. 44). In an extraordinary and continuing process, first in the United States but soon spreading to Western Europe, particular images of women - the efficient housewife, caring wife and mother, wise manager of the household budget, elegant beauty, modern superwoman organising a 'double-day', liberated sophisticate - to which the mass of women were expected to respond, were developed in the media (in particular, in women's magazines).

The marketing strategy, according to which women were encouraged to adopt both the roles and the consumer goods associated with the various images, was complex (see Ewen, 1976). But it has been persistently adaptive, its protagonists self-styled 'duck hunters' who know that 'the way to hit a target is to aim at where it's going to be, not at where it's been' (Bartos, 1982, p. 290). For example, among J. Walter Thompson's 'ducks' for the 1980s are the professional executive woman, and women heads of households who, although admittedly 'fairly poor ... may be a growing market' (ibid., p. 93).

The constant search for new markets has seen the beginnning of a similar process in the devloping world. Again, women are a central target in the bid to create 'modern' (read 'consumer-oriented') aspirations. Again, magazines are the primary - though by no means the only - vehicle. Often such magazines are transnational products, edited and produced outside the countries in which they are distributed, with perhaps some superficial 'adaptation' to local customs and style. One example is Amina, edited and produced in France, and distributed throughout francophone Africa. Its advertising, almost exclusively for beauty and fashion items, directs readers to French mail-order businesses or publicises the products of of transnational firms. The 'model' of beauty and glamour which is proposed in this kind of advertising is unarguably Western (see Santa Cruz and Erazo, 1980, pp. 126-7 for a vivid pictorial illustration of this point). A typical case is the series of advertisements carried by the Kenyan women's magazine Viva for 'Clear-tone' - a skin cream produced by the west German based Nicholas Laboratories, one of the top ten advertis-

ing spenders in Kenya. 'In London, Paris and New York', claim the ads, 'the beautiful people have one thing in common, a beautiful skin'. These cities represent the 'fresh, young world of Clear-tone. Where beautiful skin is in'. To be 'in' and part of this 'world', the inference goes, buy 'Clear-tone'. The same trends are documented in studies from other heavily transnationalised countries in Latin America (Santa Cruz and Erazo, op. cit.) as well as in the Philippines (Villariba, 1982) and Singapore (Chuan-Hua, 1980), while Indian research (for example, Amin 1981 and 1982, Amin and Pathak 1983) indicates a growing concern with similar developments.

If the middle-class, literate woman in rapidly developing countries has been especially singled out as a vessel for change, the enormous mass of women - poor, illiterate - in less developed areas do not escape either: they too are vessels, and more clearly victims of changing patterns. Cases of distorted advertising by transnational firms eager to 'dump' products - powdered baby food, contraceptives - for which markets can no longer be found in the industrialised world, are by now well documented (for example, Medawar 1979, Mattelart 1983). But less clearly recognised, and a point developed by Michele Mattelart, are the implications of the advertising methods used by these firms. The marketing of their products depends at least partly on their being situated in and associated with a particular vision of progress, of modernisation. In buying such things, the suggestion is, you buy a part of modern life; in other words, when you buy and use these products, you become connected with another - 'modern' - world. This technique promises modernisation without providing the conditions on which 'modern' practices - such as the use of powdered baby food - are contingent: in this case, for example, access to fresh water and to hygienic equipment, knowledge of babies' nourishment needs, understanding of measurement principles, and so on. Its appeal to women rests on the creation of a world-view in which modernity becomes a value to which all women may and should aspire. 'Aim your advertising at women, the main customers' Business International advises its readers. 'Make the product known, and develop a desire for the brand, without recourse to words - in regions

where illiteracy is widespread a drawing or a brand symbol can be a great help. Try to give your products a Western look, a sign of social status in rapidly developing areas where ideas of modernisation and Westernisation are closely associated" (quoted in Mattelart, 1981, p. 54).

Women, from the most to the least developed parts of the world, have become a fulcrum for the inter-penetration of transnational economics and communication, in exactly the manner suggested by the first part of the extract quoted earlier from the MacBride Report. Turning briefly to the second statement in that extract, concerning the influence of the trans-nationals on the economic production apparatus of countries, there is ample evidence that women are of the utmost importance here too. They constitute a key resource in the international division of labour. Without dwelling on the point, it is significant that women account for almost 90% of the unskilled workforce in transnational electronics firms in Central and Latin America and in South East Asia, where the large, unorganised and poorly paid female labour force is highly vulnerable to exploitation (WCUNDW, 1980a). Recruitment of young women from rural areas uses methods strikingly similar to the strategies already described in the marketing of consumer goods. "Recruiting officers will glorify the ... working environment (complete with piped music, cool air-conditioned and dust-free shops) ... Associated benefits such as ... beauty-grooming classes, annual dinners, talent-time and beauty contests are always highlighted ...In addition, these young rural women are deliberately led to think that going to work in electronics factories in the city is also a means to gain Western culture and modern ideas". (From Struggling to Survive: Women Workers in Asia, quoted in Isis International Bulletin. No. 24, 1981, p. 13). The reality is altogether different. Women such as Lim (1980), Ehrenreich and Fuentes (1981), Heyzer (1982) document the appalling working conditions and triple level exploitation which actually exist.

The Politics of International Information and Communication

It is a remarkable fact that this entire phenomenon has been largely ignored by the media, both transnational and national. It has been left to the feminist press - for example, Spare Rib, Ms. Magazine, Isis - to lay bare and analyse the roots of the problem. The only piece which I have come across in the 'main-stream' media is apparently motivated by the news that 'after years of being a nearly all-female preserve, Mexico's border assembly plants have begun to employ

men' (Meislin, 1984, p. 11). This brings up two fundamental questions which must be faced in trying to explain the relationship between women and communication. One question, which will be tackled later, concerns the criteria and definitions which make an issue 'newsworthy'.

The other question raises the matter of whose interests are being served in these various presences and absences of women in the international flow of capital and communication. It would be difficult to argue that women benefit. It is tempting to see the beneficiaries as none other than the impersonal, corporate interests of transnational enterprise. But it is impossible to ignore the role of national governments, or indeed that of international agencies such as the World Bank, in collaborating with or promoting transnational interests - and thus underwriting the exploitation of women. (See Siegel, 1978 and Ehrenreich and Fuentes, op. cit. for a development of this point). The silence of national media on these problems - indeed their role in the creation of restricted and stereotyped images of women - becomes, in this context, more easily explained. For when analysis shifts to the level of national economic and information systems, the women and media relationship is almost an analogue of the international communication scene.

The National Relationship

There are two recognised dimensions to the international imbalance in the flow and content of information: the quantitative and the qualitative. Tom McPhail summarises them like this: "Two complaints commonly crop up concerning the news that the Big Four [news agencies] report about the LDC's. For one, there is simply not enough of it ... The other criticism ... is that what there is of it tends to be sensationalistic, insensitive to the goals and values of the LDC's, and distorted, usually by the application of western stereotypes, biases, norms, cultural perspectives, and even ideological designs about the nations and materials being covered" (McPhail, op. cit., pp 175-176).

Turning immediately to another summary - this time by Marilee Karl, who describes the general research findings concerning presentation of women by the media in both industrialised and developing countries - we will find a remarkable similarity in the stated problems:

"1. Women are virtually absent from the 'important' news of the world whether transmitted by press, radio or television.

2. Very little media coverage is given to women's work, achievements, situations or needs.

3. The media are responsible for perpetuating and disseminating traditional stereotypes of women.

4. When women are involved in organising and action, and especially when they step out of their traditional roles, the media often distort and ridicule.

5. Women lack access to information they need and to which they have a right, information which would help them answer questions affecting their daily lives, problems and needs" (Karl, 1981, p. 27).

If, in McPhail's summary, we substitute 'women' for 'LDC's' and 'male-controlled/male' for 'Big Four/Western', we might almost be reading another version of Karl's. As Marilee Karl aptly points out, "the one characteristic of present information structures which is rarely mentioned, but which has far-reaching consequences, is that they are male-dominated" (op. cit., p. 26).

This is not a resort to obscurantism. It does not deny the correctness of the criticisms of the North-South flow. But it does argue that a completely parallel set of criticisms refers to imbalances - not simply in the global system itself, but within all national communication systems - which cast women and men in a dependency relationship very similar to that between developing and industrialised countries. (This point is argued, with specific reference to economic relationships, in Leghorn and Parker, 1981, pp. 207-210).

Karl's first point is that women rarely appear in news coverage. Many of the factors which influence coverage (or non-coverage) of women equally affect other social groups at the periphery of national power structures: 'event-oriented' reporting, an emphasis on political and economic elites, the 'beat structure' in news-gathering, responsiveness to public visibility (Pingree and Hawkins, 1978; Cuthbert, 1981). However, there is one basic fact which has particular implications for women as a group: most news reporters and editors are men (Gallagher, 1984). It seems inevitable then that news selection and reporting will reflect a male ordering of priorities - that there will be issues and areas of life which will go completely unnoticed. For example, the first woman to head a New York Times bureau

commented: 'There have been times when I found editors unaware of things happening, like rape laws; the men know about capital punishment' (quoted in Tuchman, 1978, p. 143). Not only may women-related concerns and activities be ignored but, if covered, they may be subjected to trivialisation or distortion (points two and four in Karl's summary). Gertrude Robinson illustrates how this works in her analysis of news coverage of the women's movement in the United States (Robinson, 1978, pp. 98-102).

The question arises as to whether an increase in the number of women gatekeepers would result in a solution to these problems. The answer, for the moment, must be 'not necessarily'. Many factors - institutional, structural, social, professional - ensure that most media women, like most media men, will operate within an identical ideological paradigm. For example, after a screening of advertisements at J. Walter Thompson which showed women exclusively in traditional roles, one of the management men commented that many of the ads were written by women. A female Senior Vice President with the company reports: 'I answered that they weren't writing as women, they were writing as professionals. And they were working within a given strategy' (Bartos, op. cit., p. 243). In Norway, Skard (1984) shows the kinds of pressure which push the woman journalist to become 'one of the boys' in professional terms. In Finland, Holopainen et al. (1984) reach the conclusion that a better balance of male and female journalists will not necessarily lead to greater equality in the newsroom. (See also Tuchman, 1978, for a good account of many of these difficulties in U.S. newsrooms).

Finally (and touching on Marilee Karl's last summary point), some of the ways in which certain women do actually conceive of, organise and execute their work differently from men - while still experiencing many of the problems already mentioned - are indicated by a recent study of Danish television news journalists (Jensen, 1982). Although Jensen found that both male <u>and</u> female journalists contribute to a general mystification and abstraction - rather than clarification - of issues, she contends that there is a difference in their styles of presentation. She describes these styles as being based on different symbols. The male presentation style rests on the symbol of authority, showing a preference for studio-

based desk reporting. The female presentation style, says Jensen, is based on the symbol of authenticity, showing a preference for on-the-spot reporting, with greater use of documentary material and interviews. She concludes that, although on a small scale, the women also 'turn their attention to viewpoints other than the traditional - in order to present the news in a more down-to-earth manner, and in order to cover issues which are more specific and closer to everyday life: this goes for conditions both at home and abroad' (p. 20).

These conclusions are underlined by the women's own predispositions, expressed in interview with Jensen. For most of them, it seems, 'soft' news was synonymous with what they regarded as positive about their work; yet were often unable to report. Jensen grouped their self-reported work strategies into three clusters:

'1. to accept that women are best at covering certain areas, which if not covered by women will remain untouched;

2. consciously to depart from the traditional pattern and go for new topics which have hitherto been closed country to women, in order to prove to themselves and other women that this is actually possible;

3. to aim at greater valuation for the topics traditionally covered by women and to fight for a redefinition of the other topics, to make them more representative of women's reality' (pp. 7-8)

All three strategies speak to the conflict experienced by women working in the predominantly male environment of the media today. For as Jensen points out, the initiatives being taken by the women she studied were at the individual level, in the face of a system which made such attempts both daunting and difficult.

The extent of this problem becomes even clearer in the light of the newly emerging experiences of all-women production companies, attempting to work in a collective fashion within established media structures. For example, Angela Spindler-Brown (1984) describes the history of Broadside, a feminist group which was commissioned by the U.K.'s fourth television channel (Channel 4) to produce a series of 16 current affairs programmes, to be transmitted during 1983. Although the group began with the idea of developing cooperative, non-hierarchical production methods, industrial and trade

union pressures - allied to economic factors - forced them into a 'traditional' production mould. Even so, the relative lack of structure led to clashes with the Channel 4 management, whose administrative routines demanded individual leadership. Although the programmes - which tried to apply a distinct women's perspective to current affairs issues - were a critical and popular success, Broadside was not commissioned to produce another current affairs series for Channel 4.

The Political Direction of Change in Communication

Even this limited presentation must show that women are absolutely central to the processes and inequalities at issue in the international debate on communication and development. They are a focus and a resource in the operations of transnational industries. They exemplify fully, in their relation to both transnational and national media systems, the very problems which have instigated the call for a new international order. Yet there is a total absence, in both the conceptualisations of and plans for such an 'order', of any dimension or perspective which takes genuine account of the situation, rights and needs of women.

To begin to explain this absence, it is enough to return to the analysis of the relationship of women to information and communication systems and structures. The conclusion was that women are constituted as a resource in processes over which they have little or no control; and that as a corollary of this lack of control they have no access to communication which would change the processes in which they are involved. Within existing communication structures, although individual women may work for - and even bring about - change, these structures remain under the direction of men. Women are almost always extremely dependent on men - whether in governments, in private enterprise, in international agencies, in communication systems, in universities - allowing them to define problems, pursue policies, allocate resources, implement programmes, in ways which would benefit women as a group. This is, evidently, a political problem. To see just how some of these mechanisms of control exclude women from the direction of change, I turn to two major 'events' of particular relevance to women and to the international debate on communication: the United Nations Mid-Decade Conference on Women, and the MacBride Report.

The issue of communication could have been expected to figure at least to some extent at the UN Mid-Decade Conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980. The regional preparatory meetings for the Conference had all stressed its importance. Three separate documents on the topic were prepared, one being the report and recommendations of an international seminar, described as a sectoral meeting for the Conference, which had been held just two months previously at UN headquarters. Yet there was little or no discussion of communication at the Copenhagen Intergovernmental Conference. The proposals on communication in the Draft Programme of Action for the second part of the Decade were weak. At least two attempts to strengthen them ran aground because of governmental reluctance to become embroiled with issues which by 1980 had become highly controversial. The tension between women's and governmental interests was evident throughout the Conference whose agenda (in terms of issues which were and were not emphasised), despite all the preparatory meetings and the detailed documentation, was - to use a term of compromise which became significant in the Copenhagen discussions - de facto revised and re-set by men.

A distinct women's perspective - much less a feminist one - was noticeably absent at Copenhagen. Leaving aside the overt power politics in which sessions were disrupted by walk-outs, or suspended by the use of committee tactics to prevent certain speakers from taking the floor, the dominant male perspective was its most blatant in the debate on the causes of women's inequality. This was reduced, in the debate, to an 'aspect' of general underdevelopment. The attempt to introduce the concept of sexism as an important - not to say over-riding - factor in inequality led to an acrimonious discussion, and resulted in the following compromise: 'The unfavourable status of women is aggravated in many countries, developed and developing, by de facto discrimination on the grounds of sex'; a footnote added 'in a group of countries this is called sexism' (WCUNDW, 1980b, para. 12; my emphasis added). The entire debate - in which half the speakers were men, a proportion well in excess of their representation at the Conference - was trivialised and insulting to women. (See Gallagher, 1981, pp. 159-163 for further discussion of these events).

When the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (the MacBride Commission) began work in December 1977, the UN Decade for

Women was two years old. No woman was initially nominated to serve on the 16-member Commission. But when one of the original members withdrew he was replaced by Betty Zimmerman, at that time Director of Radio Canada International. It was in large part due to the efforts of Betty Zimmerman that women received any mention in the final report. One hundred papers were specially prepared, by communication experts, at the request of the Commission. Only one dealt with the issue of women. Its preparation was not requested until the spring of 1979. The Commission met for the final time in November of that year.

The MacBride Report deals with women in a way which betrays this last-minute, begrudged, 'grafting'. Just two of its 250 substantive pages and one of its 82 recommendations are concerned with women's communication rights and needs. A serious analysis of the problem might have led to some detailed discussion of women in, for example, the context of transnationalisation, of advertising, of the formation of public opinion, of communication infrastructures, of professional communicators. But there is none. Instead, the 'issue' of women is collapsed into a brief section on 'equal rights for women', which sits uneasily in a chapter entitled 'Images of the World'. It is difficult to interpret the entire episode as anything other than ill-disguised tokenism.

These two accounts begin to show how far women are from being able to influence change. Even in situations where women are actually numerically superior, and much more obviously in those in which they fill the 'statutory woman' position, the <u>direction</u> of change remains a male monopoly.

<u>Feminism and the Politics of Knowledge</u>

For women there is little change. With the balance of power - in terms of political control, economics, communication and knowledge - so skewed, it is little wonder that the analyses of feminists who lived in in the sixteenth or seventeenth century are still relevant and radical three hundred years later. Despite the 'practical' reforms, the underlying problems remain. For her book <u>Women of Ideas</u>, Dale Spender - as part of her prolific effort to make visible women's perspectives and contributions - has constructed an index which tries to outline the

contents in categories as they relate to women. The number of entries for 'progress, absurd nature of concept in relation to women' is among the highest for any single topic.

One reason behind the maintenance of the status quo may be a historical and incorrect equation, on the part of feminists themselves, of social change with institutional change. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise claim that 'history is littered with examples of institutional change not leading to revolutionary social change, in the sense of profoundly affecting people's everyday lives' (Stanley and Wise, op. cit., p. 65). It is certainly true that feminist analyses in the field of communication have tended to stress the importance of structural change - in both the media themselves, and in society as a whole - as a prerequisite to fundamental change for women (for example, Gallagher 1981), and it seems now that the strength of ideology itself has been underestimated. It has been tempting to suppose, for example, that in societies undergoing revolutionary socio-structural change, genuine equality between women and men can be more easily achieved. Experience now suggests that this supposition is highly problematic.

In her study of women in Cuba, Cole (1981) concludes that, despite their 'revolution within the revolution', Cuban women still face serious problems in their status due to the 'tenacity of prejudices' towards them. Eisen (1984), reviewing images of women in the 'revolutionary culture' of Vietnam, comments 'it is difficult to conclude confidently which themes are really dominant in Vietnamese media - the woman defying traditional roles that oppress her or the woman embracing those roles. It would seem that revolutionary themes predominate, but they often incorporate patriarchal assumptions about women. Also, the affirmation of woman fulfilling her role exclusively as mother is frequent enough to pose serious questions'. The persistence of patriarchal ideology in the Soviet Union is explored in, for example, Hansson and Liden 1984, and Mamonova 1984.

But perhaps the most important lesson in the role of ideology comes from recent developments in the People's Republic of China. Examining the effects of a media consciousness-raising campaign aimed at rural women in China during the 1970s, Elizabeth Croll (1979) argued 'that it is the

ideological constraints, as opposed to the structural constraints, which are identified as primarily inhibiting the redefinition of the role and status of women'. She concluded that the emphasis placed on communication in China reflected a quite central belief that ideology has its own power to determine the base. Yet just a few years later, that base was being subjected to quite new determining influences. Commenting on the growth of advertising in China, Croll (1983) finds that 'the posters of the model worker have been replaced by new posters portraying women as consumers in the company of washing machines, cooking pots, watches, television and toothpaste or cosmetics'. Remarking that the Women's Federation of Beijing objected to the developments and had taken the matter up at ministerial level, Croll nevertheless reports that the women 'were not optimistic about their chances of success given that the advertisements were intimately bound up with the larger and growing commercial interests and connections with the West'.

Similar patterns, of course, have been found in 'non-revolutionary' societies as dominant ideology follows the shifting pattern of the political-economic system. For example, in the United States, Fisher, Gandy and Jamus (1981) show how popular media images of women have corresponded to the contours of national health policy. In the United Kingdom, Dale Spender (1984) notes the politico-historical process in which the achievements of British women in the 1920s were erased by the widely accepted story of their return 'to the confines of domesticity'. Interpreting this as evidence of the ability of the dominant group to arrange beliefs and evidence to suit its own interests, she concludes: 'I have come to be even more impressed with the necessity and urgency for women to be in charge of our own knowledge, to produce our own versions of what happens and why - and to ensure that the next generation is familiar with <u>our</u> story, as well as the 'official' one. This is a political priority for women' (Spender, op. cit., p. 27).

It is also a priority for feminist scholarship.

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